



Fact Sheet for the First 5 California Special Needs Project

Goal: To strengthen the School Readiness Initiative and other First 5 California programs, including Preschool for All and Health Access for All, serving all children by demonstrating and disseminating effective practices for programs and systems serving young children with disabilities and other special needs. This includes improved program standards, advocacy and effective funding platforms.

Special Needs Project emphasis areas include:

1. Universal access to screening for early identification/diagnosis and referrals for physical and developmental issues (including social/emotional/behavioral).
2. Improved access to and utilization of services and supports through coordination and reallocation of existing resources and building of new supplemental resources.
3. Inclusion of young children with disabilities and other special needs in appropriate typical preschools, child care and development and other community settings with provision of necessary supports to help the child succeed in these environments.
4. Evaluation to identify effective practices and to improve programs.

Background:

In March 2003, the First 5 California Children and Families Commission approved a total of \$20 million over five years to support the First 5 California Special Needs Project that addresses two areas: 1) Children with Disabilities and Other Special Needs and 2) Mental Health. The combination of these two areas was considered with significant input and discussion. It was determined that merging the two areas would be beneficial to maximize early identification of conditions that are often overlooked or difficult to diagnose, improve connections to services for children with existing disabilities, and provide services to children in need of supports, particularly in the area of behavioral/mental health, but who have no current diagnosis or eligibility for an existing categorical program. The First 5 California Special Needs Project will be implemented through Demonstration Sites and a Statewide Coordination and Training contract. The Infant, Preschool and Family Mental Health Program also received funding.

Funding levels (\$18 million has been designated as of February 2004):

- Statewide Coordination and Training Contract: Approximately \$5 million over five years.
- Demonstration Sites: Up to \$10 million total over four years. There is a local match of equal value.
- Evaluation: Up to \$1.5 million total is available for an independent evaluation of the Demonstration Site programs. That evaluation will be added on to the responsibilities of the statewide evaluator of the School Readiness Initiative.
- Infant, Preschool and Family Mental Health Program: \$1.5 million over two years to continue the local projects one year and disseminate effective practice information.

Project Status as of February 2004

Demonstration Sites:

The Demonstration Sites will implement and model effective strategies and systems improvements that will provide the basis for future First 5 program standards and advocacy efforts. The Request for Funding for the Demonstration Sites will be developed in early 2004 with input from First 5 CCFC, the Special Needs Project advisory group and Statewide Coordination and Training contractor.

1. The Special Needs Project will fund approximately ten Demonstration Sites based in county School Readiness Initiative programs.
2. These Demonstration Sites will test a reconfigured service delivery approach that provides families access to a spectrum and continuum of services appropriate to their child's individual special needs.
3. Demonstration site selection will occur in late 2004.

Statewide Coordination and Training Contractor:

Through a competitive bid process, the contract for the Coordination and Training component of the Special Needs Project was awarded to Sonoma State University/California Institute on Human Services (CIHS). The statewide entity will coordinate and support the First 5 California Special Needs Project Demonstration Sites by:

1. Developing recommended selection criteria for the Demonstration Sites;
2. Evaluating and recommending screening/assessment tools and processes;
3. Coordinating a network of the Demonstration Sites selected by CCFC to support implementation of Special Needs work plans to meet expected project outcomes;
4. Developing a training curriculum for/with Demonstration Sites and for wider dissemination;
5. Providing direct training and technical assistance to each of the Demonstration Sites including the development and implementation of culturally and linguistically appropriate strategies and approaches;
6. Providing training and other resources to Demonstration Sites to enable children with special needs to participate successfully with typically developing peers in appropriate preschools, child care and development programs, and other community settings.
7. Coordinating and supporting selected statewide training and leadership activities to disseminate promising practices from the Demonstration Sites (this activity will begin in 2005). Statewide training and technical assistance will include: regional training on effective practices and development of products such as a training curriculum and a screening and assessment guidebook. The education and training programs and services of this project will be offered in local, regional and statewide settings as well as through on-line resources.

Infant, Preschool and Family Mental Health (IPFMH) Program:

Over the next two years, the IPFMH Program, which is conducted by the California Department of Mental Health in partnership with WestEd and the California Institute for Mental Health, will complete the work that began in 2001 by:

1. Supporting the 8 local assistance projects for one additional year.
2. Disseminating the project's promising practices through four major deliverables: Clinical Services Study, Financing Strategies Manual, Screening and Evaluation Compendium, and Triage and Referral Findings.
3. Providing technical assistance and training to the School Readiness programs and their mental health partners to better address the socio-emotional, behavioral and mental health needs of young children and their families.

For more information about this project:

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